Elihu Yale (1649–1721) Yale University Namesake

Origin and Family

Born April 5, 1649. Died July 8, 1721.[1]

Father: David Yale (1613–1690)
Mother: Ursula Knight.[3]
Spouse: Catherine Elford[1]

Elihu Yale was born April 5, 1649 in Boston, Mass. to David Yale and Ursula Knight Yale. He was the grandson of Ann Lloyd Yale, who after the death of her first husband, Thomas Yale (1587–1619), married Theophilus Eaton and migrated with her family to the New Haven Colony in 1638.[1]

Elihu's father David was a wealthy merchant who preferred Boston to New Haven and settled there for a few years before returning to England in 1652.[1]

It appears that David Yale arranged for a classical education for Elihu, though no record of a college degree at Eton or elsewhere has been found.[3]

In 1680 Yale married Catherine Elford, widow of Joseph Hynmers, second-in-command of Fort St George, India as Deputy Governor for the East India Company. Her father was the wealthy merchant Walter Elford.[3]

Elihu Yale, c. 1710

Their wedding took place at St Mary's Church, at Fort St George, India, where Elihu was a vestryman and treasurer. Together, they had 4 children:[1]

- David Yale died young in 1687.
- Katherine Yale (died 1715), married Dudley North of Glenham Hall.
- Anne Yale (died 1734) married Lord James Cavendish of Chatsworth House, son of the 1st Duke of Devonshire of Hardwick Hall, and Lady Mary Butler.
- Ursula Yale, who never married, died in 1721.

In 1687, after the death of Jacques de Paiva, a Portuguese diamond merchant and mines owner, Yale formed a relationship with his widow Hieronima de Paiva and brought her to live with him, causing considerable criticism within the colonial society at Madras. They had a son who died, along with his mother, in South Africa.[3]

Occupation and Property

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European countries had begun expanding trade with India, and for England this took the form of the East India Company. Yale arrived in Madras around 1670 as an employee of the East India Company.[1] Over the next two decades he advanced through the company's ranks, eventually becoming a member of the governing council. The first notice of him in print is in describing the solemnity of proclaiming King James II., at Madras in August, 1685. He is recorded as holding the rank of second member of council. In July 1687, Yale was appointed President of Madras and Governor of Fort St. George, replacing William Gyfford.[3]

Elihu engaged in several lucrative business enterprises, mostly dealing with the diamond trade. He amassed a fortune of £200,000 (£32.2 million in 2025).[2] In 1692, Yale became embroiled in disputes with the East India Company over allegations of excessive private trading and other irregularities. This resulted in the termination of his position and several months of imprisonment.[3] In 1695, after a review by the King of England (William of Orange), he was released and permitted to return to England.[3] He arrived in England in 1699 and returned to the Yale family home at Plas Grono.[1]

Yale University

Cotton Mather represented a small institution of learning that had been founded in 1701 in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, as the Collegiate School of Connecticut. In 1718, Cotton Mather sought Yale's assistance with the school as it needed money for a new building. Yale sent Mather 417 books, a portrait of King George I of Britain, and nine bales of goods.The goods were sold by the school for £800. In gratitude, the trustees named the new building Yale. Eventually, the entire institution became Yale College. An interesting family connection is that Yale College was partially built on property once owned by Elihu's uncle, Captain Thomas Yale of New Haven.[3]

End of Life

Yale died on 8 July 1721 in London.[4] His line became extinct, with no descendants surviving beyond his great-grandchildren. He was buried in the churchyard of the parish church of St Giles' Church, Wrexham, Wales. His tomb bears this inscription:[4]

Born in America, in Europe bred,
In Africa travell'd, and in Asia wed
Where long he liv'd and thriv'd in London dead.
Much good, some ill, he did, so hope all's even
And that his soul thro' mercy's gone to Heaven
You that survive and read this tale, take care
For this most certain exit to prepare
Where blest in peace the actions of the just
Smell sweet, and blossom in the silent dust.

Tomb of Elihu Yale

Born in America, in Europe bred
In Africa travell'd and in Asia wed
Where long he liv'd and thriv'd; In London dead
Much good, some ill, he did; so hope all's even
And that his soul thro' mercy's gone to Heaven
You that survive and read this tale, take care
For this most certain exit to prepare
Where blest in peace, the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in the silent dust.

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Research Notes

Online Genealogy References:
WikiTree ID: Yale-50
FamilySearch ID: LHK6-XMR

Further Reading:

- Yale, Max Brian. *Guide to the Max Brian Yale Genealogical Collection*. *Max Brian Yale Genealogical Collection.* 2025
- Yale, Max Brian. *Yale Family Coat of Arms* - Origin and History. *Max Brian Yale Genealogical Collection*, 2025

References

1. Yale, Rodney Horace. *Yale Genealogy and History of Wales*. Beatrice, NE: Milburn & Scott, 1908. Ref no. 24 p. 101

2. Bingham, Hiram (1937). "Elihu Yale : governor, collector and benefactor". *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*: 144.

3. Dictionary of Welsh Biography: YALE family, of Plâs yn Iâl and Plas Grono Wrexham

4. Find a Grave. Memorial 7479334

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